



United States
Department of
Agriculture

Agricultural
Marketing
Service

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TO: Tenderness Forum II Attendees
Tenderness Claim Initiative Subcommittee Members

FROM: Martin O'Connor, Chief
Standards, Analysis and Technology Branch

SUBJECT: Summary of Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) Meat Tenderness Forum II

AMS hosted the Meat Tenderness Forum II in Gainesville, Florida, on June 22, 2008, to determine the structure of an AMS Meat Tenderness Marketing Claim. This open forum was a follow up to the first forum held on March 27, 2007, and the conference calls of the four subcommittees involved in this initiative. Forty one individuals from academia, government and industry attended the Tenderness Forum II compared to 46 individuals attending Forum I.

Table 1 gives a statistical look at the makeup of each group of attendees. Nineteen of the attendees were present for both forums. Attendee breakdown by percentage from Tenderness Forum I (3/27/07) and Tenderness Forum II (6/22/08) are as follows:

Table 1

General Affiliation	Forum I	Forum II
Government	20	22
Academia	30	49
National Organizations	9	7
Industry – Packer/Processor/Retailer	30	22
Industry – Science/Technology/Instrumentation	11	0
TOTAL	100	100

The background of the AMS Tenderness Marketing Claim Initiative was given that included a summary of the six questions developed during the first forum. This was followed by update presentations from the following subcommittees on the progress made by conference call since the last forum: (1) consumer implications and sensory, (2) methodologies, (3) testing and verification, (4) economic implications, and (5) predictive technology. The slides from these presentations can be found on the USDA-AMS Meat Tenderness Claim Standard Initiative Web site: [http://www.ams.usda.gov/AMSV1.0/ams.fetchTemplateData.do?template=TemplateN &page=TendernessMarketingClaim&resultType=&acct=lsstd](http://www.ams.usda.gov/AMSV1.0/ams.fetchTemplateData.do?template=TemplateN&page=TendernessMarketingClaim&resultType=&acct=lsstd)

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The forum then turned to an open discussion format. Subcommittee members with relevant data were invited to present their information during this portion of the meeting. Presentations were made by or on behalf of Dr. Gretchen Hilton, Oklahoma State University; Dr. Rhonda Miller, Texas A&M University; and Dr. Mark Miller, Texas Tech University. Dr. Hilton provided information on a proposed study that would provide information regarding the consumer threshold for lamb tenderness. Both Dr. Rhonda Miller and Dr. Mark Miller presented information regarding consumer perception of beef tenderness and showed fairly linear responses between Warner-Bratzler shear force and consumer overall liking or acceptance.

Dr. Rhonda Miller's data had an inflection point for the *longissimus dorsi* at about 4.0 kg while Dr. Mark Miller's data showed no inflection point indicating that it might be difficult to determine threshold. Tenderness data relating to the *longissimus dorsi* from the National Beef Tenderness Surveys, Pork Benchmarking Study and National Market Basket Survey for Lamb and information about the different forms of marketing claims within AMS was presented. In an open forum, the attendees were then charged with answering the following question: **In your opinion, what should a tenderness claim look like?**

The open discussion was moderated by Dr. Jeff Savell, Texas A&M University. Below are the notes from the open discussion grouped by idea.

Tenderness Claim vs. Standard:

- Retail perspective – tenderness claim is important
- Retail perspective – concern of economic impact
- Marketing perspective – needs to be a labeling standard that goes through the Federal Register
- Standardized claim needs to meet certain criteria in order to have a consistent product.

Components of Standard:

- Look at the range, not just the mean, to prevent one bad eating experience
- Claim needs to reflect capability of prediction technology
- Need a “line in the sand” for standard and verification purposes
- Processor perspective - “line in the sand” standard, across cuts, enhancements (processing)
- Retail perspective – middle meats area of focus
- Foodservice perspective – do not limit how you get to tender
- Labeling claim should be a reward to commitment to program
- Claim will be interpreted as “guaranteed tender” not 70% confidence in tender
- Needs to be consistent and universal
- Needs to deal with variation
- Standard should be unbiased to cooking and other processing technologies
- Limit to middle meats and individual muscles

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- System to predict tenderness should have consistent benchmarks
- “Tender by natural processes” (Inherently) or “Tender by process X”
- Sampling plan within a program is important
- Process = verified, measurement = certified
- Only one “line in the sand” should be necessary across all species/processes
- Producers use tenderness as a measure – they want a threshold to shoot for
- Voluntary standard

Labeling Discussion:

- There are existing programs that currently label as improving tenderness
- Consumers think products labeled as “steak” are tender
- Tender is used in fanciful labeling or supportive claims currently
- Likely, FSIS will allow current labels with a tenderness claim to maintain that claim until they submit a label change, then they would have to conform

Other Things to Consider:

- This is a marketing discussion, not a scientific discussion
- Making a marketing standard available creates efficiency
- Why would we not want to move chuck and round cuts into a labeling claim?
- We have been researching ways to make tough products tender – increasing consistency and improving tenderness is our goal
- Should a standard be used to sort along supply chain?
- What are the unintended consequences of a tenderness claim?
- What is FSIS’ role with this claim standard?
- Will this claim standard be certified or verified by the USDA?

The Steering committee will take the opportunity to review this data further and provide guidance to allow the initiation of drafting a Meat Tenderness Marketing Claim Standard by AMS. Once a draft standard is developed, it will be circulated throughout each of the subcommittees for any suggested refinements. As this process continues, updates to the Web site noted above will be posted. Additionally, feel free to call me at (202) 720-4486 or email me at martin.oconnor@usda.gov if you have any questions or comments.

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